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Renaming of places in Namibia in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era: Colonising and decolonising place names

Petrus Angula Mbenzi*

Abstract

Place names undergo metamorphosis in every country. There are various factors which lead to name changes, ranging from undesirability of a particular name to colonisation. Place names that are considered offensive may be changed while colonial rulers commonly replaced indigenous place names with names from their country of origin. The demise of colonial rule in Africa led to colonial names being replaced by place names which symbolise Africanness. This paper investigates the strategies used by colonisers to rename places and those used to replace colonial names. Based on the theory of colonialism and post-colonial theory the paper examines the impact of colonialism on Namibian indigenous place names and investigates how the indigenous people of Namibia attempted to remove reminders of past injustices. The name changes made by the colonial authorities through total replacement, hybridisation, and deformation are discussed and the haphazard manner in which the decolonisation of place names has been carried out with scant regard for the international guidelines as enshrined in the policy of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) is examined. It is recommended in this paper that Namibia establish a national place names committee to spearhead the naming and renaming of places in accordance with UNGEGN principles.

Introduction

Namibia has experienced various regimes. Prior to colonial rule, the various population groups of Namibia were ruled by *aakwaniilwa*, *gaobs*, *litungas* among others. Namibia was a German colony, German South West Africa, from 1884 to 1915 and was captured by South Africa during the First World War. After the war, it was declared a League of Nations Class C Mandate territory under the Treaty of Versailles, with the Union of South Africa responsible for its administration. The Mandate was supposed to become a United Nations Trust Territory when the League of Nations Mandates were transferred to the

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United Nations (UN), following the Second World War. The Prime Minister of South Africa, Jan Smuts, refused to hand over South West Africa to the UN and it became the fifth province of South Africa in 1946 which, in effect, meant that it became a colony of South Africa.¹

Bota Thura Manatsha argues that

colonialism played a major role in “erasing” the identities of the conquered and colonised communities in many ways. The colonisers got rid of the indigenous or local names of many places and streets. They replaced these names with names that represented their identities, culture and ideology.²

The German colonial authorities were eager to germanise place names whether those place names were of Afrikaans, Nama, or Otjiherero origin. C. J. Coetzee and A. S. Christel discussed place names in German South West Africa and indicated that before 1850, the missionaries either gave places biblical names (e.g. Bethanie, Berseba, Gibeon, etc.) or names of places from their country of origin (e.g. Barmen).³ A commission was established in 1892 which proposed that existing names of places be retained. The Germanisation of place names in the colony became a contentious issue in Germany and, in 1909, a working group was established to look into the matter. The working group recommended that names that are difficult to spell for Germans be replaced with the German names. This meant that some of the indigenous place names remained unchanged.⁴

Namibian independence on 21 March 1990 brought many changes in the political landscape. In many places, colonial names were replaced, not always without opposition. This paper investigates the renaming of places in the pre-colonial, colonial- and post-colonial era in Namibia, examines the reasons for renaming and the responses of the affected communities to the renaming process. The dearth of onomastic studies in Namibia coupled with the lack of up-to-date information on toponymy in Namibia prompted this study.

The material for this paper came from newspapers and existing literature. The information from these sources was critically reviewed, evaluated and interpreted by means of the content analysis method. The theoretical basis for this paper is provided by the theory of colonialism which assumes “the control by individuals or groups over the territory by other individuals or groups”.⁵ Thus according to the theory of colonialism, one nation exercises control over another politically and economically. In addition, the

¹ Alfred T. Moleah, *Namibia: The Struggle for Liberation*, Wilmington, Disa Press, 1983.

² Boga Thura Manatsha, “The politics of renaming streets in Francistown, Botswana, *Historia*, 59 (2), 2014: 269-288 (272).

³ C. J. Coetzee and A. S. Christel, “Die beleid wat gevolg is by amptelik namegewing in Duits-Suidwes-Afrika”, *Logos*, 5 (1&2), 1985: 64-72

⁴ Lucie A. Möller, “Duitse plekname in Suidwes-Afrika”, in: P. E. Raper, (ed.), *Names 1983: Proceedings of the Second Southern African Names Congress, Pretoria, 13–15 September 1983*, Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council, 1986: 193-208; Coetzee and Christel, “Die beleid”.

⁵ Ronald J. Horvath, “A definition of colonialism”, *Current Anthropology*, 13 (1), 1972: 45-57 (46).

paper is also draws on post-colonial theory which advocates “the need to make a new start and to erase the painful memories of the colonial subordination”.⁶

Historically, black Namibians incorporated fauna, flora and topographical features into place names. They also gave places names that reflect history and religion, often honouring their leaders thus. Renaming of places in the pre-colonial era, however, occurred spontaneously or informally. The Germans were eager to germanise place names in German South West Africa. They replaced indigenous place names with German names under the pretext that indigenous place names were difficult to spell and pronounce while they also sought to retain a connection with their motherland. The attitudes of the Germans are reflected in the Oshiwambo proverb: *Keumbo okeumbo*. (Home is home no matter where you are). The attitudes of black Namibians is closer to that in the proverb: *Nekwa lya tsima oye nyoko, ooyina yaantu kaa lililwa*. (The one with dusty belt is simply your mother because you cannot cry for the mother of the other people, i.e. be pleased with what you have). With the attainment of independence in Namibia, black Namibians were eager to replace colonial place names. However, it was not only colonial place names which came under review and as there were no official guidelines as to how such matters were to be handled the issue became politically charged.

Literature review

There are a few scholars who have researched place names in Namibia. The few articles available demonstrate how limited the material is. This subsection reviews the body of existing literature on place name changes in Namibia and beyond. Due to the paucity of studies on place names in Namibia, literature on the subject from other countries is also reviewed. The aim of this section is to identify the intellectual lacunae in the existing literature on place names.

Similarities and differences between African toponomastic studies and studies in Europe

The study of toponymy has been on-going in Euro-western cultures for centuries. Terhi Ainiala discusses the demise, perpetuation and changes in place names in Finland.⁷ She states that a place name can only survive if it is used by many people and has a lasting referent. She further indicates that names of bodies of water, of natural features and of hills and bridges have a better chance of survival, because they refer to permanent features. Ainiala further argues that “place names die when they are no longer needed.

⁶ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, New York, Colombia University Press, 1998: 4.

⁷ Terhi Ainiala, “On perpetuation, demise and change in place names”, in: Ritva Liisa Pitkänen and Kaija Mallat, (eds.), *You Name It: Perspectives on Onomastic Research*, Helsinki, Finnish Literature Soc., 1997, 18-34.

The abandoning of farms and changes in inhabitants naturally contribute to the disappearance of names”.⁸

Several names of old shops disappeared in northern Namibia because the buildings were destroyed during the war, e.g. Onamagongwa, the name of a shop in the Oniipa constituency disappeared after the owner was killed during the war and the shop destroyed. The new owner rebuilt and renamed it. Names of paths and hand-dug wells have disappeared in rural communities because people now travel less on foot and use tap water, e.g. Ondjila yuuwa (the name of the road in Oniipa constituency) has disappeared, because the road is no longer used.

While place names die or change, they may also be transplanted. A name is transplanted when it is changed from the source language to the target language. Naftali Kadmon distinguishes between endonyms and exonyms and defines “an endonym as the locally-used form of a toponym which is accepted by the endemic population in its native language”.⁹ Most of the Oshiwambo names fall under this category as they were coined locally. “An exonym is a name given to a topographic feature by a linguistic community which has no official status in the territory in which the feature is located”.¹⁰

According to Kadmon, there are three main reasons for the evolution, existence, and persistence of exonyms, namely, diachronic argument, pronunciation problem and cross-border place name. In this study, only the first two reasons are discussed as they are in keeping with the focus of this paper. Kadmon explains that

The first is historical. In many cases explorers, unaware of existing local names, or colonizers and military conquerors unmindful of them, gave names in their own language to geographical features having native names and these exonyms remained in use in their respective countries.¹¹

This is typical of what happened in Namibia when it fell under German rule. Places that bore Herero or Nama names were given German names, e.g. Swakopmund, replaced the Otjiherero name, Otjozondjii.¹² The second reason for exonyms stems from problems of pronunciation. A specific speech community may not be able to pronounce a particular foreign name, or even to hear some of its sounds, and thus might misrecord it. This is the factor cited by the Germans in Namibia when they ‘Germanised’ most of the indigenous names. The Germans claimed that they could not pronounce and spell long Otjiherero names and complained about the clicks in the Nama language.¹³

⁸ Ibid.: 19.

⁹ Naftali Kadmon, *Toponymy: The Lore, Laws and Languages of Geographical Names*, New York, Vintage Press, 2000: 142.

¹⁰ Ibid.: 143.

¹¹ Ibid.: 145

¹² Theofilus K. Kamupingene, “Meaning of place names and phenomenon of nomenclature in Otjiherero”, *Logos*, 5, 1985: 66-71.

¹³ Möller, “Duitse plekname”.

Names were also changed in Europe to remove symbols of past injustices. Writing on the change of street names in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), Wolfgang Ahrens explains that:

The renaming of streets in the GDR usually proceeded in two phases. During the first, politically and culturally offensive names were removed, and during the second, ideologically 'correct' names were assigned. There was, of course, an intermediary stage during which first politically and culturally neutral names were given, which then in turn gave way to the ideologically 'correct' names.¹⁴

A similar situation also occurred in Finland when Finland became independent in 1917. Sirkka Paikalla writes that all Russian signposts were removed and some of the names of street and other public places were changed. Several places have been given names that refer to Finland's independence, for instance, *Vapaudenaukio*, *Vapaudenkatu* ("Liberty Square," "Liberty Street") and *Itsenäsyydenkatu* ("Independence Street"). In many towns streets were renamed Independence Street to mark the 40th anniversary of Finnish independence.¹⁵

A similar process to that in Europe at that time, of renaming of places to restore the cultural identity of the natives, also arose in many African countries after they had gained independence. Mali Machaba, writing on the post-apartheid era in South Africa, states that:

It has been evident in most African countries that in the quest to restore cultural heritage, people have been changing not only personal names, but also names of geographical features. Since Independence, many countries, such as Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia); Namibia (formerly South West Africa); Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire); Tanzania (formerly Tanganyika) and others had their colonial names changed. In most formerly colonized countries, institutions, cities and streets have been renamed.¹⁶

There are parallels between findings in Namibian literature on place names and research on place names conducted in Europe. In both cases colonial authorities replaced the place names in colonies with names from their place of origin but with the defeat of colonialism, the newly independent countries replaced the colonial names with local names in an effort to eliminate symbols of past injustices. The demerit of these works is that they do not deal with the responses of the affected communities on the renaming process.

Research on place names in Africa

There has been a growing interest in onomastic studies in Africa over the years. A number of studies have been conducted on place names with various approaches being

¹⁴ Wolfgang P. Ahrens, "Street names and street name changes in the German Democratic Republic", *Onomastica Canadiana* 69 (2), 1987: 1-14 (1f.).

¹⁵ Sirkka Paikalla, "Names of foreign rule in Finland", *Nomina Africana*, 15 (1&2), 2001: 114-120.

¹⁶ Mali Machaba, *Naming, Heritage and Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, PhD thesis, Pietermaritzburg, University of Kwazulu-Natal, 2005: 66.

employed. In South Africa, there are scholars who focus on name changes. Elwyn Jenkins, Peter Raper and Lucie Möller discuss place name change.¹⁷ Among the authorities on the subject they refer to is the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) which has produced guidelines on how to manage the nature and spelling of place names with a view to achieving a degree of international consistency.¹⁸ They discuss the rules of the National Place Names Committee (NPNC) which govern the standardisation of place names in South Africa and provide arguments for and against name changes. They also point out why it is undesirable to name or rename places after political leaders.

Adrian Koopman comments on name change in South Africa as follows:

A few of the hundreds of name changes have taken place in South Africa since 1994. It is not only place names that have changed, but names of people, institutions and of objects. Together with these name changes, the icons and symbols of the nation have altered as well.¹⁹

Although the changing of place names seems to be a widespread phenomenon in Africa, it does not meet universal approval among scholars. Jenkins, Raper and Möller argue that the changing of place names is undesirable when carelessly executed without consideration of the associated costs. They further argue that private sectors are likely to sue the government for the resulting costs.

Place name change can result not only in enormous costs but may also lead to loss of income in the tourism industry. Tourists encountering difficulties locating a renamed place may be prompted to abandon plans and visit another country instead. The printing of new symbols and the work of cartographers may also lead to costs for the government and affected private sectors. The changing of place names creates a snowball effect, as businesses within a town or street may be required to update websites, maps and directories.

Place name changes, although costly, were carried out in several African countries after independence. Nna Uluocha explains this trend thus:

During the period following the colonial era many leaders of the newly independent African countries started a process [sic] of de-nomination and/or re-nomination destined to restore to Africa its authentic identity. This process consisted of a restitution of original names to African places and people or the bestowing on these social entities of new African names. Although in most cases the name change was the result of the implementation of a top-down decision taken on behalf of the people, there have been some countries such as South Africa where some name changes have occurred as the result of a democratic process. Some towns in Zimbabwe which had retained local names but in

¹⁷ Elwyn R. Jenkins, Peter E. Raper and Lucie A. Möller, *Changing Place Names*, Durban, Indicator Press, 1996.

¹⁸ Cf. Lucie A. Möller, "Criteria for proposed names changes", *Nomina Africana*, 9 (1), 1995: 86-105.

¹⁹ Adrian Koopman, *Zulu Names*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 2002: 6.

corrupted form during the colonial era had these corrected to reflect the correct Shona pronunciation.²⁰

Uluocha further mentions African countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo where most place names given by the Belgians were replaced with original indigenous names; South Africa where intensive efforts are still being made to reinstate geographical names in their aboriginal forms; and Nigeria where there have been calls from various people “since 1960 for the country’s name as well as those of cities, towns, streets, and some other infrastructure, which are of foreign origins, to be changed”.²¹

As was the case in other African countries after independence in post-independence Namibia, several streets were named after nationalist leaders, such as Hendrik Witbooi, Mandume Ndemufayo, Hage Geingob, Libertine Amathila, Hidipo Hamutenya, and Sam Nujoma. Although it seems the renaming of places in Namibia is in some cases aimed at removing symbols of past injustices, in other cases it appears to be carried out in an arbitrary manner. Places that bear the names of insects, animals, historical events and plants have also been renamed. Certain schools in Omusati and Ohangwena regions, such as Eenkalashe (name of edible fruit) and Oshikunde (place of beans) were renamed after business personalities and politicians respectively. In such cases, obliterating the painful past memories of colonial insubordination is no longer the main motivation.

According to the principle of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names:

Personal name should not be given to a geographical feature unless such application is in the public interest. The person commemorated should have contributed significantly to the area where the feature is located; when such a name is applied, it should normally be given posthumously. The adoption of a personal name during the lifetime of the person concerned should only be made in exceptional cases. Ownership of the land should not be the grounds for the application of the owner’s name to a geographical feature.²²

The Canadian principle appears to be relevant for Namibia where names of political or other prominent leaders are often given to places. Political popularity is fickle and such names often become objectionable, at least to a section of the community who may not have been asked their opinion in the first place.

Mali Machaba, in a recent study on onomastics in South Africa, expressed the following opinion on name change:

What some people fail to see is that naming especially of geographical entities is indeed a political game. It is for this reason that with a new government in place, name changing will be evidenced. Naming various geographical entities after political leaders is not supported in this study, regardless of the enormous contribution that those various individuals might have made to the country.

²⁰ Nna O. Uluocha, “Decolonising place names: Strategic imperative for preserving indigenous cartography in post- colonial Africa”, *African Journal of History and Culture*, 7 (9), 2015: 180-192 (185).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Cited in Jenkins, Raper and Möller, *Changing*: 97.

During the 1950s where Afrikaners had the dominant culture who would have thought that names such as Verwoerdburg, Voortrekker Street, Louis Trichard and Pietersburg would be changed? It is for this reason that names of dominant political leaders (ANC) will be at the centre of change should the political situation in South Africa change. While political leaders come and go, descriptive names remain, because they will always describe the place as it is.²³

This study also stresses that the naming or renaming of a place after a person should happen posthumously unless that person's contribution was truly immense. But even in such a case, the approval of the affected communities should be sought. One recent case in Namibia demonstrated this. The Kamphaku Hospital was renamed as it had been named after a cruel Aambalantu king, Kamhaku kaHuhwa (1810-1835). Aambalantu objected to the perpetuation of the name of a tyrant. They succeeded in renaming a hospital, which was opened in 1980, to Outapi Hospital in 2003.

Research on place names in Namibia

Various scholars have conducted research on place names in Namibia. Theofilus Kamupingene examines the meaning of place names and phenomenon of nomenclature in Otjiherero. He gives examples of Otjiherero place names that have been misspelled and consequently lost their meaning. He also mentions the names of places that have been replaced with names from other languages, e.g. Otjomuise was renamed Windhoek.²⁴

In the final analysis, he suggests that proper research be conducted to correct the past errors with regard to place names. Kamupingene, however, fails to point out that various towns bear names from different African languages in Namibia, for example Windhoek is known as Otjomuise in Otjiherero, Omukuto in Oshiwambo and /Gai//gams in Khoekhoegowab. As a result, previous administrations seem to have found that they could only please one group at the expense of others. If the authorities had chosen Otjiherero names, it could have been regarded as favouritism by the other language groups.

Some names which have been retained officially come from Khoekhoegowab, e.g. Karibib, Tsumeb and Usakos (though not in their original forms). Some Otjiherero names have also been retained, e.g. Okahandja, Otjiwarongo and Omaruru. It can be argued that ownership of ancestral land was considered when deciding on the retention of a place name in a particular area, as names that survived Germanisation are found in places that historically were predominantly occupied by a certain tribe.

In his study on German place names in South West Africa, Lucie Möller discusses Germanisation.²⁵ In the first cases missionaries and merchants gave the mission stations German names, such as Lieveberg, Vogelsang and Wilhemfeste. According to Möller the

²³ Machaba, *Naming*: 285.

²⁴ Kamupingene, "Meaning".

²⁵ Möller, "Duitse plekname".

Germans decided to rename certain places in order to maintain ties with their ancestral land and to retain their cultural identity. The Otjiherero and Nama names were difficult to spell and pronounce, especially the long Otjiherero names, such as Otjihaenamaparero, Ondundozonanandana and Otjiamanongombe. The click sounds of Khoekhogowab also proved unpronounceable for German colonialists. They practised what Ronald Horvath calls intergroup domination in which a culturally heterogeneous society is dominated by settlers who migrated from the colonising power.²⁶ In this case, the Germans dominated the Herero, the Nama and the Afrikaners (Oorlams).

The German colonial government established guidelines for germanising indigenous names which stressed the importance of retaining of Otjiherero names and the consideration of other language groups when places were being named. Despite these guidelines, the replacement of Otjiherero and Nama names with the German names continued. However, the hybrid forms of names occurred in some instances. Otjiherero-German hybrid forms such as Klein Otjikango Ost, Omahoro Gross, Klein Otjiruse, etc. came into being. Afrikaans-German hybrids such as Kameelmund, Kuduskuppe as well as the Nama-German hybrids Naosfelsen, Garuchabfluss were also introduced. Some indigenous and Afrikaans names were translated into German e.g. the Afrikaans name Kromnek was translated as Krumneck, the Otjiherero name Okamaruru was translated as Salzbrunnen.²⁷ By hybridizing place names, the Germans wanted to show their tolerance of the cultures of the colonised, but in translating the indigenous names into German, they also wanted to show their superiority over the colonised people and this attitude appears to be a demonstration of the “linguistic prejudices and cultural chauvinism of the colonisers”.²⁸ According to Horvath, “imperialism is a form of intergroup domination wherein few, if any, permanent settlers from the imperial homeland migrate to the colony.” By hybridising the place names, it demonstrates that the Germans maintained “the type of colonisation in which settlers neither exterminate nor assimilate the indigenes”.²⁹

Renaming of places in the pre-independence era

Renaming places is not a new phenomenon in Namibia. In the past, Aawambo used to rename places for specific reasons. Some places were renamed because the names that they bore were potentially offensive. For example, a tree in Ondonga which was earmarked as a place for circumcision Omwandi gwOondha (tree of penises) was renamed Omwandi gwAalumentu (tree for men). In Oshiwambo mentioning private parts directly is a taboo, hence euphemisms are used; for example the word: ondha (penis) is referred to by several designations, e.g. uulumentu (manhood), ontembukinamwene (a thing that migrates with its owner). Jenkins, Raper and Möller argue that blasphemous,

²⁶ Horvath, “Definition”.

²⁷ Möller, “Duitse plekname”.

²⁸ Alec J.C. Pongweni, *What is in a Name? A Study of Shona Nomenclature*, Harare, Mambo Press, 1983: 87.

²⁹ Horvath, “Definition”: 47.

indecent, offensive, vulgar, unaesthetic or embarrassing names are likely to be changed.³⁰ Thus, Omwandi gwOondha would be an obvious candidate for renaming.

Renaming was also undertaken to avoid confusion where the same name was used for two geographical features. A cluster of shebeens in the Oniipa Constituency in the Oshikoto Region was first named Omukunda Omutiheyali (the seventh ward). This name was also used for a ward in the Onandjokwe Lutheran Hospital which was reserved for tuberculosis patients. The name was thus associated with alcoholism as heavy drinkers often ended up being treated for TB up in the seventh ward in that hospital. Many shebeens sold a very strong liquor, locally known as 'efau', and it was believed that the high consumption of 'efau' led to TB infection. According to the headman of Okambonde whose father owned a shebeen there in 1977, this confusion and negative association led to the name being changed. This is illustrated by this sentence: *Otandi yi kOmukunda omutiheyali* (I am going to the seventh ward). It would not be clear from the sentence what the speaker is referring to, because both places bear the same name. To make matters worse, these places were just a stone's throw from each other. This name, Omukunda omutiheyali, was supplanted by the name Olumbongo (a place with money).

The renaming of places was not confined to Owambo but was also seen in south and central Namibia where German colonial authorities changed names. The Germans assigned new names to places that bore names from indigenous languages. According to Charles Pettman, Hugo Hahn renamed the place known to the natives as Otjikango (place of hot springs) Barmen, after Hahn's hometown of Barmen in Rhenish Prussia.³¹ Keetmanshoop was renamed in honour of J. Keetman, the principal of the London Missionary Society in 1866. It was known earlier by the Dutch name Swart Modder (black mud). Okakoverua was first renamed Angra Peguena by the Portuguese and later Lüderitz after Adolf Lüderitz, a Bremen merchant who obtained an area of some two hundred square miles of territory round the bay. The area known to the natives as Itenge was renamed Capri-Zipfel. It was renamed in honour of Graf Georg Leo von Caprivi, the German Imperial Chancellor (1900–1904). The renaming of these places shows that the Germans practised both imperialism and colonialism.³²

Thus the Germans transplanted their place names to German South West Africa. Such transplantation may also involve linguistic transplantation in which some names were simply transliterated, e.g. !Usa-lkhōs became Usakos. It thus appears that renaming in the pre-independence era was intended to remove undesirable names and also to show political hegemony.

³⁰ Jenkins, Raper and Möller, *Changing*: 105.

³¹ Charles Pettman, *South African Place Names. Past and Present*, Johannesburg, Lowry Publishers, 1931.

³² Horvath, "Definition".

Controversies surrounding the renaming of places in the post-colonial era

There is a growing trend to rename places in Namibia. The main arguments in favour of the practice are the eliminate duplication and the removal of symbols of past injustices. In the north of the country there are several cases of a name being used to denote more than one place or feature. Oniipa, for example, is the name of a parish, a school and a constituency. However, such a name is always accompanied by a generic term which serves as a distinguishing device to “avoid confusion between persons and places”.³³ In some cases, such names may be confusing for tourists and travellers if the truncated form is used.

Writing about renaming in South Africa, Itumeleng Phalane explains that:

The renaming of places is an exercise that is likely to continue for a long time as South Africa continues to redefine itself. Therefore, it is critical for municipalities to be mindful of the procedural steps when introducing a name change, namely, giving sufficient notice as to when public meetings will be held, consulting with as many communities within the municipality and stakeholders as possible and allowing enough time for public stakeholder debates before name changes are recommended to the minister.³⁴

The procedure followed in South Africa makes provision for the wider participation of the public in the debate when a new name is proposed. The affected communities are accorded an opportunity to either approve or disapprove a new name. The South African model for renaming would be worth adopting for countries in which there is currently no appropriate legislation.

After independence, the City of Windhoek renamed a number of streets. This seemed to be justifiable as the streets bore the names of colonizers and it was appropriate to replace them with the names of significant figures in the struggle for independence. However, there were no regulations in place to control the process. There was little or no opposition to the renaming of places in Namibia in the first few years after independence. But a motion tabled in parliament in 2005 calling for the restoration of original place names and correction of the deformed names gave rise to public debate.

According to Lindsay Dentlinger, the renaming of places became a thorny issue in 2005 when Katuutire Kaura of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) tabled a motion in parliament, seeking the restoration of Namibian place names to their pre-colonial indigenous names.³⁵ Kaura pointed out that some regions, such as Oshana, Oshangwena, Omusati, Oshikoto and Kavango were in a fortunate position, because very few places there bear colonial names. He indicated that there were many misnomers in town names due to mispronunciations and mutilations. He also pointed out that the

³³ Jenkins, Raper and Möller, *Changing*: 97.

³⁴ Itumeleng Phalane, “Renaming of Places”, June 4, 2007, p. 4, <https://www.bowmanslaw.com/insights/dispute-resolution/renaming-of-places/> [accessed June 6, 2019].

³⁵ Lindsay Dentlinger, “Name Changes Proposal Sets Cat among Pigeons”, *New Era*, May 18, 2005, p. 1, <https://www.namibian.com.na/print.php?id=16119&type=2> [accessed June 6, 2019]

Caprivi region was named after a German coloniser. He considered it a pity that the inhabitants of Caprivi region referred to themselves as Caprivians, as if they were the descendants of Von Caprivi. Kaura suggested that Windhoek should be renamed Otjomuise (an Otjiherero name for Windhoek).

There was a heated debate in parliament when Kaura proposed that towns, such as Karasburg, Mariental, Keetmanshoop and Rehoboth should receive Otjiherero names. A SWAPO member of parliament, Marlene Mungunda was quick to point out the Damara/Nama equivalents. She accused Kaura of distorting Namibian history. Kuaima Riruako of National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO) stated that names did not concern him or his party. Nora-Schimming of the Congress of the Democrats warned that the changing of names could have a unifying but also a dividing effect. She further told the parliament that instead of using scarce resources to change place name, they should be used on more pressing issues. Prime Minister Nahas Angula suggested that the motion be referred to the committee of experts in the National Monuments Council for proper research on the origins of names and their meaning.

Several Namibians also reacted to Kaura's proposal, Gwen Lister stressed the significance of a national strategy in renaming of places to avoid disputes among the affected communities. In her column she argued that:

This is a minefield. Therefore, there must be a strategy in place about what criteria should be used to rename towns, villages and settlements. The history of such place names should be thoroughly researched in order to make renaming decisions based on empirical facts. Such National strategy cannot be developed without a meaningful national debate.³⁶

Also reacting to Kaura's motion, Kelly Aribeb wrote as follows:

I wish to refer to the motion tabled by MP Kaura regarding name changes for certain towns in Namibia. When important issues of national interest are discussed in Namibia, people have the tendency to shoot the messenger instead of analysing the message. In this case I care less about who made the proposal and therefore would not go for Kaura's political history or his character. I also wish to point out that in principle; there is nothing wrong with changing a few names of Namibian towns. This is because certain towns have simply meaningless names connected to Eurocentric history while other names represent vicious corruption of names which need to be corrected. The question that arises is, how we go about it. Although I am not surprised that Kaura proposed exclusively Herero names – I am sure he is aware that all the towns he mentioned have Damara/Nama names as well as in other languages. So which names will finally stick, and based on which criteria? Based on this I think he made a good in-principle proposal but he jumped the gun by proposing exclusively Herero names. This is also on top of the fact that quite a fair number of towns already boast Herero names, such as Outjo, Otjiwarongo, Omaruru, etc. Secondly, he did not fully appreciate the complexities and conflicts that may

³⁶ Gwen Lister, "Political perspectives", May 13, 2005, *The Namibian*, p. 15.

arise by making a name proposal at this early stage while there are no guidelines in place.³⁷

Aribeb also provided the Nama/Damara names for certain towns in Namibia, because he wanted to demonstrate that towns bore more than one name:

- Windhoek – /Ae-//Gams: place with steaming/hot water (hot spring);
- Tsumeb – Tsumep: a place that would sink into earth in Hai//om language;
- Gobabis – Khoan-dawes: place where elephants lick (salt lick). One would suspect that the name Gobabis is derived from Setswana which is widely spoken in that part of the country;
- Karibib – a corruption of Garibeb: place of farming activities;
- Usakos – a corruption of !Usa-lkhōs: place of holding one's forehead;
- Swakopmund – Tso-axaub-ams: Tsoaxaub= “Swakoprivier” and “ams” =mouth;
- Walvisbay- !Gomen-//gams: a water of the Topnaar people
- Grootfontein- Gai-/aub: ‘Gai’= big and ‘/aub’ = a fountain or spring.

Such deformation of place names reflects of a form of imperialism in which neither extermination nor assimilation occurred as there was a lack of wholesale acculturation.³⁸ According to Uluocha “unscrupulous deformation of indigenous toponyms by the colonial power seemed to be a naked display of their pseudo psychological sense of superiority over the colonised people”.³⁹ Uluocha also argues that “dropping a letter from the spelling of the original name and replacing it with another letter is done for easier pronunciation”.⁴⁰ Deformed names should be restored to their original forms so that Namibia’s authentic identity may be restored. However, the decolonisation of place names must be conducted in a democratic manner. In other words, there must be broad consultation with the affected communities.

Thus, there is a need to formulate national guidelines in order to manage the renaming and naming of places in line with international standards. There are no such guidelines in Namibia. The absence of national guidelines means that controversy often ensues when places are renamed. Manatsha describes the renaming process in Botswana thus:

The consultation to suggest names can take place through the village development committees, the kgotla (village gathering meetings) and any other forum. The names are then forwarded to the full council for vetting and approval. If the full council is satisfied, the names are forwarded to the Ministry of Local Government for final approval. Once approved, the relevant ministry

³⁷ Kelly M. Aribeb, “Strategy for Renaming” *The Namibian*, May 19, 2007, p. 11, <https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=15871&page=archive-read> [accessed June 6, 2019].

³⁸ Horvath, “Definition”.

³⁹ Uluocha, “Decolonising”: 185.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

and departments reproduce land-use maps showing the newly added street and place names.⁴¹

It would be appropriate if Namibia were to follow the example of Botswana in handling the renaming issue so that future debates could be conducted within legal parameters and the whimsical renaming of places checked, thus avoiding what Horvath calls 'informal imperialism' in which power is channelled through the local elite.⁴² Furthermore, Jemima Beukes writes:

I would like to know the reasons for naming streets after Robert Mugabe, Fidel Castro, etc. Considering that recently we fought for having streets named after either ancestors or to honour a specific national. Will it not be in our interest when we change those street names to call them after our own?⁴³

This complaint suggests that the consultation process may not have been broad enough. Similarly Ismael Preis put his views in a letter to *The Namibian* newspaper as follows:

Main streets invariably reflect a country's current political situation and many of the street names in Namibia were deemed politically incorrect after independence. These street names were changed at an enormous cost to the country and its taxpayers, even in the case where it changed the character of a town, e.g. Swakopmund. However, the general feeling was that these changes and costs were necessary to honour those people who have played a major role in the establishment of an enlightened and equal society. [...] I suggest that we honour our new President, Hifikepunye Pohamba, who has so far, shown his character, his strength and leadership abilities in a positive and impressive way. In his indiscriminate fight against corruption, he has done much to unite the people of Namibia.⁴⁴

Naming streets after people is not universally popular in Namibia. In *The Namibian* of 6 July 2007, in an article headlined: Pohamba proposes President Street, it is reported that:

While the Windhoek City Council is considering renaming several streets after liberation heroes, including President Hifikepunye Pohamba, the head of state has made another proposal to the local authority. The idea to rename Krupp, Malcolm Spence and Reginald Walker Streets originates from the Office of the Mayor, Mateus Shikongo, way back in November 2004. Residents were not involved but only City Councillors were approached to propose names. During the monthly town council meeting, last Thursday, new street names were revealed for the first time. The Mayor's Office informed President Pohamba earlier this year that Hochland Road, which runs from Snyman Circle to Hochland Park, was to be renamed after him.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Manatsha, "Politics": 270.

⁴² Horvath, "Definition".

⁴³ Jemima Beukes, "Name after our own". *The Namibian*, July 19, 2005, p. 10.
<https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=13367&page=archive-read> [accessed June 6, 2019].

⁴⁴ Ismael Preis, "Rather Pohamba than Mugabe", *The Namibian*, October 25, 2005,
<https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=17590&page=archive-read> [accessed June 6, 2019].

⁴⁵ Staff reporter, "Pohamba Proposes President Street", *The Namibian*, July 6, 2007, p. 11,
<https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=33631&page=archive-read> [accessed June 6, 2019].

This is an example of a top down approach to renaming which is facilitated by the absence of a regulatory body in Namibia to spearhead the naming and renaming of places. However, Pohamba was not in favour of the proposals to honour him as seen in his letter dated May 10: "I would, however, like to propose that the street close to the new State House be named President Avenue or Street. This would not only honour me but all past and future presidents of this country".⁴⁶ President Pohamba's rejection of the proposal shows that he was aware that naming a street after a person could prove controversial and lead to other presidents seeking similar honours.

The issue of eliminating symbols of past injustices with regard to the names became contentious in 2007. Diescho complained about the wrong use of the name 'Omashare' in Kavango:

The name of the lodge is offensive to the people of Rundu and Kavango. In the Kavango language we do not have the letter 'o' before a word and we believe that for our history to be recorded correctly, we demand to be respected as a people. The name should be MASHARE not Omashare. Businessmen and women who want to live in peace with us need to treat us with respect as we wish to treat them. I plan to hold meetings in Rundu in the near future to mobilise the entire Kavango region to descend on the premises in protest should Rosa fail to acquiesce to the demands. I shall lead the marches to your hotel so that you can hear us once and for all. It is also my intention to mobilise a prolonged boycott of your facility until you hear us.⁴⁷

In response to Diescho's demand, Rosa, the owner of the lodge says:

I never thought of changing the name because to me it does not make a difference what a business is called, for as long as it is operating legally under the laws of the country, creating job opportunities.⁴⁸

In addition, Rosa's lawyer, Koep described Diescho's demands as baseless, as they were not supported by any legal parameters in the national constitution against the use of any name.

It is unfortunate no legislation on naming has been enacted in Namibia. Such conflicts could be resolved through legal processes. Currently such issues give rise to a seemingly interminable stream of arguments and counterarguments. In the case above Simon Shire wrote in support of Diescho's stand in his letter to the *Informanté* of 7 June 2007, under the Headline "Dischoe's battle for tribal name is justified":

Please allow me a space in your letter's column to comment on the story that appeared last week in the *Informanté* newspaper of May 31, 2007 edition, entitled 'Diescho in battle over 'tribal name'. The fact that the word tribal was used in the head sentence of the story might have sent a wrong message that Professor Diescho is a tribalist, which evidently is not the case. Reading further in the story one could get a message that the local people do not have any power over the issues concerning their own languages and cultures as there are people who can articulate it better by using the country's constitution as

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Peter Koep, "Diescho in Battle over Tribal Name", *Informanté*, May 31, 2007, p. 1.

⁴⁸ "Rosa responds", *The Namibian*, June 1, 2007, p. 1.

orthography. It is against this background that I would like to say the following:

1. Issues of languages deal with the identity and culture of a people. They are, therefore, sensitive especially in former Settler Colonies such as Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Evidently, it is in this context that Professor Diescho has cautioned the Lodge owner to be sensitive when dealing with such issues.

2. There is also orthography in Rumanyo which is one of the Rukavango languages where that Omashare name is supposed to have been written. That orthography dictates how to write in Rumanyo. It, for example, states that: "Rumanyo names of places should be spelt according to the officially recognised orthographic form, e.g. Mashare". It is, therefore, illegal to write Omashare which is confusing to the learners who are being taught to write correctly in their mother languages.⁴⁹

The violation of the official orthography of Rumanyo, as Shire sees it, is significant. According to the Handbook on Geographical Names of the South African Geographical Names Council (SAGNC), "names which do not conform to the present orthography of the language concerned should be submitted to SAGNC to be considered for change".⁵⁰ The resolutions adopted at the sixth UN Conferences on the standardisation of Geographical Names in 1987 as cited in Lucie Möller reads: "It is recommended that the spelling of geographical names be as much as possible in accordance with the current orthographical practice of the country with due regard to dialect forms".⁵¹ The UN Resolution adopted in 1987 is still valid today. Thus, Diescho simply made a genuine appeal to the Lodge owner to correct the transgression. It should be noted that place names form an important part of the toponymic heritage of a people. Misspelt and corrupted names distort the culture, language and history of the affected communities. Such objections against misspelt names by the affected communities should be taken seriously. If the spelling of a name contravenes the officially recognised orthography, then corrective action should be taken. But the concerned members of various communities also need to be sensitized to the fact that the misspellings of names should not be attributed to Europeans only.

In 2011, the renaming of Onampadhi Primary School in the Oshikoto region gave rise to a conflict. The family of the school's founder and first principal, the late Sakeus Amunyela, opposed the move. The school management wanted the school to be renamed after a member of the community, while the Amunyela family wished it to be renamed after their father. The late Sakeus Amunyela's daughter, Rauha Hartney, claimed that her father's name was an automatic choice because he used his money to buy roofing materials and took some chairs from his house to establish the school. Amunyela had been principal of the school from 1981 until 1986 when he retired at the age of 67 years. Hartney further explains:

I have written to the Minister of Education and to the school principal where I raised my objection to the planned renaming of Onampadhi Primary School. As

⁴⁹ Simon Shire, "Dischoe's battle for tribal name is justified", *Informanté*, June 7, 2007, p. 6

⁵⁰ South African Geographical Names Council, *Handbook on Geographical Names*, Pretoria, South African Geographical Names Council, Dept. of Arts, Culture, Science, and Technology, 2002: 28.

⁵¹ Möller, "Criteria": 89.

a family, we do not understand why the school that was founded by our father has to be renamed after someone else whose legacy is not in the school. We do not understand the criteria used in choosing the candidate, when our father is an automatic candidate.⁵²

Rauha Hartney's argument resonates with the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names,⁵³ which stipulates that a person after whom a place is to be named must have contributed significantly to that place. Hartney further claimed that she had been petitioning the school principal, Festus Sheyanale, the Oshigambo Circuit Inspector, Nicky Ugwanga, and the Ministry of Education to rename the school after her late father. Hartney raised the matter with Education Permanent Secretary, Alfred Ilukena, who referred the matter to the Oshikoto Education Directorate. The school principal and the school circuit inspector concurred that as the 90% of the parents voted in favour of another person the Amunyela family should accept the change. The voice of the aggrieved family members was heard, however, the name of the school was not changed.

While the renaming of Onampadhi primary school was shelved due to pressure from the Amunyela family, there were cases where members of the public tried in vain to have the renaming of a place or street stopped. There were also cases where legal action was taken. In 2011 there was a legal challenge to the plans to rename Gloudina Street in Ludwigsdorf, Windhoek, which continued for about a year. The article which appeared in the *Namibian Sun* provided details about the dispute.

The proposal to rename Gloudina Street after Joseph Ithana, was challenged by a prominent lawyer, Andreas Vaatz. Vaatz brought an urgent application seeking that the Municipal Council of the City of Windhoek be directed and ordered not to rename or change the name of Gloudina Street and Uhland Street in Ludwigsdorf and Klein Windhoek respectively. The plaintiff wants the Court to declare that an existing street name in any municipality in Namibia should not be changed without the approval and support for the proposed name change first having been obtained from the majority of the residents residing or operating a business in the street and who are materially affected by the name change. Prior to this legal battle,

Gloudina Street made headlines the previous year when livula-Ithana and Zambian High Commissioner Mavis Muyunda got involved in a tug-of-war about the renaming of the Ludwigsdorf street. At the time, livula-Ithana insisted that the street be renamed after her late husband, while Muyunda wanted it to be renamed after Dr Kenneth Kaunda. livula-Ithana emerged the victor in the 'fight', while Muyunda had to make do with Uhland Street as a 'consolation prize'.⁵⁴

⁵² Shasimana Ugulu, "Oshikoto school naming turns nasty", *The Villager*, September 26, 2011, p. 3, <https://www.thevillager.com.na/articles/284/oshikoto-school-naming-turns-nasty/> [accessed June 6, 2019].

⁵³ Cited in Jenkins, Raper and Möller, *Changing*: 97.

⁵⁴ Werner Menges, "Lawyer Vaatz fights on after street renaming", *The Namibian*, October 3, 2011, p. 1, <https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=86224&page=archive-read> [accessed June 6, 2019].

The battle over who Gloudina Street should be renamed after brought about an avalanche of responses in *The Namibian* of 12 July 2010. Some responses raised objections to the interference of the Zambian High Commissioner in the renaming of streets in Namibia:

I don't see the point where a High Commissioner has to tell the other country to rename the street according to her wish. There is already a street for Dr KK. If she wants to honour him, then they can change all street names in Zambia. I believe that will make her happy.⁵⁵

In fact, there was nothing wrong with the High Commissioner of Zambia suggesting to the City Council that a street be renamed after Kaunda. It was her prerogative to do so and she followed the correct procedure, as the City of Windhoek Chief, Niilo Taapopi said in response to a similarly xenophobic remark in 2014 “the public has the right to make proposals on who they want to bestow a street name.”⁵⁶ The word public does not discriminate between Namibians and non-Namibians. This non-exclusion of foreigners in the making of proposals on name changes is enshrined in the policy of the City of Windhoek on naming and renaming, which stipulates that the members of the public are encouraged to make proposals to the City on renaming of streets. Naming or renaming a place after a foreigner is not fundamentally wrong as many foreigners have contributed to the development of places or institutions. For example, Selma Rainio, a Finnish missionary, established Onandjokwe Lutheran Hospital, the oldest hospital in Namibia. This hospital served many patients in the pre-colonial era, colonial era and continues to serve people in the post-colonial era.

Ivula-Ithana prevailed in the above case, as the street was finally renamed after her deceased husband, but the dust has not yet settled on the matter. The residents of the street have decided to challenge the renaming in court. Andreas Vaatz filed an urgent application with the High Court in a last ditch attempt to stop the renaming ceremony, but his application was dismissed. This case highlights the fact that “there is a lack of coordinated movement to rename places and landmarks in most African countries”.⁵⁷ This suggests that there is a need for a legal body to regulate such disputes in Namibia. Such a body might also reduce the number of places being randomly renamed.

During the court proceedings over the renaming Gloudina Street the lawyers for the defendant, the City of Windhoek, and the plaintiff, Andreas Vaatz, presented their arguments and counterarguments:

Advocate Natasha Bassingthwaighe, appearing on behalf of Andreas Vaatz, the applicant in the case, stressed that the Municipal Council should have consulted with the residents in the area before taking the decision to rename Gloudina Street to Joseph Mukwayu Ithana Street. She stressed that as a ratepayer, Vaatz is entitled to be consulted in a street renaming, especially with regard to

⁵⁵ Kisting Denver, “Gloudina street lingers on”, *The Namibian*, July 12, 2010, p. 1.

⁵⁶ Werner Menges, “Lawyer loses last round in street name”, *The Namibian*, October 10, 2016, <https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?page=archive-read&id=156438> [accessed June 6, 2019].

⁵⁷ Uluocha, “Decolonising”: 190.

Gloudina Street. Vaatz argued that he lived in Gloudina Street for more than 27 years and that the street address has “become part of him.”

According to him, it is unfair to expect him, at the age of 70, to get used to a new street name. Adv. Bassingthwaighe said the general policy statement and not the procedure itself, on renaming of streets is published by the City Council. According to the principles of fair and reasonableness, when someone's right or interest is affected then that person must be heard. She added that her client has a direct interest in the matter. Nixon Marcus opposing the application on behalf of the City of Windhoek said the applicants have not made out a case for the issuing of an interim interdict. In respect of a declaratory order he submitted that the relief is “legally incompetent” and cannot be granted.

Marcus argued that the respondents state that there is no compulsive requirement to change the name of the street and he opposes on this ground. Vaatz based his application on Article 18 of the Namibian Constitution and submits that the City of Windhoek has not been fair and reasonable towards him and other residents. Marcus argued that the fact that Vaatz does not seek to review and set aside the decisions by the City of Windhoek to rename Gloudina Street to Joseph Mukwayu Ithana Street is significant.⁵⁸

The challenge by Andreas Vaatz to the renaming of Gloudina Street failed in the High Court. The *Namibian Sun* of June 24, 2011 reported that Judge Collins Parker found that:

The applicant has not established his standing in seeking an order on behalf of all residents and businesses in Gloudina Street. The court found that the applicant had neither brought a review application nor did he seek a declaratory order. Consequently the Court holds that it has no power to order the administrative body not to carry out its functions and perform its duties under an applicable statute.

Additionally, the court has no power to prescribe to the Windhoek Municipal Council the manner in which it should exercise a discretionary power given to it by Act. The Judge found that the statements made by the applicant in his affidavits are not just disparaging, they are calumnious and vituperative and odious in the extreme and are directed at the Hon. Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana and the memory of her late husband. He said the insults are uncalled for and unjustified and they can never be countenanced in any judicial proceedings in any civilised legal system like Namibia's. Iivula-Ithana had applied to the Council to honour her late husband's name by renaming a street after him by virtue of his contribution to the liberation of Namibia and to the building of Namibia's post-independence public service.⁵⁹

Gloudina Street was renamed after the court interdict failed. A renaming ceremony was held on June 22, 2011. Speakers at the ceremony made no reference to the legal battle. A Member of Parliament, Ben Amadhila, simply described Joseph Ithana as an unsung hero, while Windhoek Mayor described Ithana as someone who stood for justice, dignity for all, equality, ethical conduct and unity.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ “Judgement reserved in Gloudina street case”, *Namibian Sun*, May 24, 2011, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Menges, “Lawyer Vaatz”.

The renaming of the places in Namibia was supported by the Government of the Republic of Namibia. In the state of the nation address of 2012, President Pohamba asked why a certain town in Namibia was called Lüderitz. The president asked: “Do we really need to have our port called Lüderitz? Who is Lüderitz in the first place?” Pohamba further added: “And we have a region called Caprivi. Something should be done and has to be done.”⁶¹ In addition, President Pohamba recalled that lawmakers had already restored Namibia’s name from South West Africa (SWA), while many roads and streets in the country had also been renamed in honour of Namibian heroes. The elimination of the acronym SWA also applied to names of companies and institutions. After independence, the Namibian Government, through the Ministry of Information and Publicity, directed that all companies and institutions should delete the acronym SWA from their names. However, it appears that many companies have not heeded this call, as names such as SWAvet, SWAtrust, SWArite and SWABOU life still exist and there are, in all probability, many more companies or institutions bearing such names.

The renaming issue came up again in parliament in October 2012, when a member of the All People’s Party (APP), Ignatius Shixwameni raised his objection to what he termed a “sudden, rampant and haphazard wave of renaming streets, schools, government institutions and public places”.⁶² Shixwameni’s intervention was timely because, as Catharine Sasman reveals:

Foreign diplomatic missions have reportedly approached the City of Windhoek to rename streets after their former heads of state and heroes. One proposal is that Uhland Street be renamed in honour of former Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda while another foreign mission proposed that any street, but preferably Uhland Street, be named after former Kenyan President Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. Gevers Street is suggested to be changed to former Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah, and the Venezuelan embassy wants Auas Street to be named after former President Simon Bolivar. There was also talk of changing 'colonial' place names, such as Lüderitz and Caprivi. The Karas and Caprivi regional councils were asked to pass resolutions to effect the changing of these names. Regional governors were asked to get proposals for names to replace the names of streets, places and buildings.⁶³

The proposal by the foreign diplomats to have streets renamed after leaders in their countries can be construed as informal imperialism. The involvement of regional councils and governors might be consultation of sorts, but there does not appear to have been any consultation with the affected communities. This contrasts with the UNGEGN’s recommendation which stresses a bottom-up approach in the renaming process.

Renaming a place without consulting the affected communities seems to be a trend in the whole country. On July 10, 2010, the leader of the Hambukushu tradition authority in Kavango, Fumu Ervin Munika Mbambo, ordered that the Shikokondoro village and

⁶¹ Catharine Sasman, “Shixwameni irked by renaming”, *The Namibian*, October 11, 2012, p. 1, <https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=101038&page=archive-read> [accessed June 6, 2019]

⁶² Anna Nakale, “Namibia: Stop haphazard wave of renaming everything”, *New Era*, October 11, 2012, p. 1.

⁶³ Sasman, “Shixwameni”: 1.

Shadipwera primary school be renamed 'Ruvidha', as the two names had no meaning. Mbambo set no deadline for the changing of the name, and advised his secretary not to accept or sign any letter bearing the name Shadikongoro.⁶⁴

A Cabinet ad hoc Committee of 2007 on heroes and heroines, under the chairmanship of the then Deputy Prime Minister, Libertine Amathila, recommended a moratorium on naming monuments, buildings, equipment and streets after living people. The committee felt that such naming should be done posthumously.⁶⁵ It appears that this recommendation was largely ignored, as more places were renamed after living heroes and heroines in the ensuing years. In contrast, in international practice places are generally named or renamed after a person posthumously.

The renaming of places after politicians or business personalities is a difficult issue. Azaryahu argues that "naming streets should not be the exclusive priority of those who have administrative and political agendas and are vying for control over the public domain".⁶⁶ Honouring heroes and heroines in various fields is a perfectly acceptable practice but alternative ways should be found because "politics is fickle and the fame of a politician is subject to change".⁶⁷ Thus politicians in power may have places renamed or named after them but, when public opinion turn against them, demands for the removal of all boards displaying their name follow. There have already been such instances in Africa and elsewhere in the world. According to Ahrens, all names which had an immediate association with the Third Reich were replaced in the German Democratic Republic and all streets named after Nazi leaders and icons were renamed.⁶⁸

Jenkins, Raper and Möller argue that if name changes become politically inspired manipulative tools, they may militate against better understanding of a place and its people. They become the cause of disputes, instead of being communicative symbols. They also see name changes as unnecessary and creating confusion:

Every change of name is extremely expensive and the money would be better spent on crime prevention, poverty alleviation, job creation, housing, education health improvement, combating corruption and so forth. Names are essential elements of effective communication and every name change detracts from that leading to wastage of money, time and energy. Names are important elements of the cultural and linguistic heritage of the people and name changes destroy part of that national asset.⁶⁹

The renaming of places could have far reaching consequences for the Namibian economy. Quite apart from the cost of replacing maps, signage, letterheads etc., renaming places can lead to confusion among the visitors; for example, when

⁶⁴ Haikera, Olavi, "Hambukushu leaders orders renaming of Shadikongoro". *The Namibian*, July 27, 2010, p. 1. <https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=68761&page=archive-read> [accessed June 6, 2019].

⁶⁵ *The New Era*, 2 June 2010.

⁶⁶ Cited in Manatshe, "Politics": 276.

⁶⁷ Jenkins, Raper and Möller, *Changing*: 22.

⁶⁸ Ahrens, "Street names".

⁶⁹ Jenkins, Raper and Möller, *Changing*: 22.

Omungwelume (the place of leopards) in Ohangwena was renamed Bethesda parish the clue to its location in the old name was lost. The same applies to Bethel parish. The name Onamukulo (the place of marshes) is still used because it gives clear information on the location. Residents of renamed places still refer to them by their old names to indicate their place of origin because the new names have often not yet gained currency among community members. UNGEGN advises against the unnecessary changing of names, but recommends that objectionable names be eliminated.⁷⁰ The two parish names referred to above could not be considered objectionable.

Commenting on the popularity of a new name, Ahrens reveals that:

In renaming streets and choosing new names the sentiments and wishes of the residents were rarely taken into consideration. Thus new names were slow in being taken into everyday use. Indeed, based on personal experiences, the old names are still used by residents of towns even thirty years or more after the streets have been renamed.⁷¹

Many people in the four 'O' regions (i.e. Oshikoto, Ohangwena, Omusati, Oshana) are still not comfortable with the new names, even if such names have been in official use for several years. Common examples include the two parishes cited earlier (i.e. Bethesda and Bethel). Similarly, when tourists ask for directions, residents of towns have difficulty in locating streets with new names. "Place names are regarded as navigational aids, so when they are changed, then the tour guides are also at a loss in directing visitors."⁷²

Jenkins, Raper and Möller also argue against the unnecessary changing of names:

Changes have to be incorporated into all maps, directories and gazetteers. They have to be published so that they can be taken into account in the business, travel and tourism industry, the news media and national and international government affairs and used by individuals. Most importantly, the changes affect postal and electronic communications. The changes cause inconvenience and confusion.⁷³

The changing of place names in Namibia gained momentum when President Hifikepunye Pohamba appointed the fourth delimitation commission on 7 January 2013. The main task was to review the existing boundaries of the regions and constituencies. President Pohamba received the commission's report in July 2013 which proposed the renaming of some regions and constituencies. The proposal to change Lüderitz to !Nami#Nüs and Caprivi to Zambezi led to disputes between supporters and opponents of the change. The President announced the renaming of the Caprivi and Lüderitz constituencies. The residents of Lüderitz, calling themselves the 'Buchters' took to the streets, calling for a

⁷⁰ Ibid.: 89.

⁷¹ Ahrens, "Street names": 7.

⁷² Naftali Kadmon, "Toponymic education and practice and international cooperation: existing education and practice", Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardisation of geographical names, Berlin 27 August – 5 September 2002: 7.

⁷³ Jenkins, Raper and Möller, *Changing*: 89.

reversal of the decision.⁷⁴ In the absence of a regulatory body, one would expect “political opposition to arise from some quarters to forestall the renaming project”.⁷⁵

There were, however, some community members who supported the renaming of Lüderitz. In particular, the !Aman tribe, a subtribe of the Nama, claimed to have founded Lüderitz and a group of them gathered to welcome and defend the renaming. The Buchters, the people of the bay, reacted angrily to the renaming of Lüderitz: “Let the name changes not be imposed, lest such imposition may imply autocracy. People should have been consulted.” This statement was opposed in a SMS message which appeared in the Namibian newspaper:

Who did “they” consult when the name was changed from !Nami≠nūs to the so called Luderitz? A big thank you to our president for renaming it back to its original name, !Nami≠Nūs. It has been long overdue. When we say !Nami≠Nūs, I personally say it with pride, a name given by our own proudly Namibian people, the !Aman community, as they were the first to settle at the coastal town, !Nami≠Nūs. President Hifikepunye Pohamba, you have my vote for next elections.⁷⁶

The question “who did they consult...?” highlights the fact that renaming is an expression of authority and power. It further shows that those who were once rulers feel threatened when places are renamed. The former colonised people, on the other hand, feel that the renaming of a place symbolises their newly regained sovereignty.

Reacting to Cabinet approval for the renaming of Lüderitz to !Nami≠Nūs, Joeseb Awebahe explains that:

It is high time that the Government of the Republic of Namibia establishes a Namibian Geographical Place Names Authority. A name that is held in high reverence by a group of people, might stir up memories of painful emotions in another group of people. A Geographical Place Names Authority would invite comments and suggestions from all interested persons and or entities. A sensitization campaign should then be launched in order to create awareness pertaining to the historical connotation of a name, and the reason/s for the proposed name change.⁷⁷

In a similar situation, the renaming of the Caprivi region did not go down well with some residents. When the renaming of Caprivi was mooted in government circles, there were worries that the renaming would stoke tribal tensions. One concerned stakeholder asked: “What will the new name of Caprivi be? Will it be Itenge [“Small Place”], with which the inhabitants are not satisfied or Linyanti?”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Henning Melber, *A Decade of Namibia. Politics, Economy and Society: The Era Pohamba 2004–2015*, Leiden, Brill, 2016: 56.

⁷⁵ Uluocha, “Decolonising”: 190.

⁷⁶ “Colonial name changes”, *Informanté*, September 5, 2012, p. 11.

⁷⁷ Joeseb Awebahe, “Cabinet approved !Nami≠Nūs in 2012”, *The Namibian*, August 19, 2013, p. 1, <https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=113123&page=archive-read> [accessed June 6, 2019].

⁷⁸ Jan Poolman, “Caprivi renaming raises hackles”, *The Namibian*, July 30, 2012, <https://www.namibian.com.na/110725/archive-read/Caprivi-renaming-raises-hackles> [accessed June 6, 2019].

Writing on the renaming of Caprivi, A. Muchali states:

Given that many young and old folks from the newly named Zambezi Region opposed the idea, one wonders if this name will gain popular support or simply fade away. Many people from the Caprivi Region have opposed the idea of renaming the region for two generations. Why the sudden change of heart, or was it induced? [...] Judging from the different social networks, many people feel that the name change was imposed on the inhabitants of the region, which is sad.⁷⁹

A newspaper article by Immanuel Shinovene and Luqman Cloete seems to answer the question raised by Muchali:

The former chairperson of the Fourth Delimitation Commission, Judge Alfred Siboleka, yesterday said people were consulted on the new names of the regions and towns earlier this year. Siboleka said all meetings were publicised on radio and in print media when the commission started its work in February this year, until April when the consultations in all the regions were completed. These were open public meetings and attendance was also free. All dates were made public.⁸⁰

It seems the Fourth Delimitation Commission followed procedures to communicate with the affected communities. A similar procedure was also followed in Western Australia in the renaming and naming of places and it is worth quoting such procedure:

There must be genuine effort to encourage public involvement in the decision making process. Information must be disseminated to a broad range of stakeholders and interested parties via public notices, newsletters, flyers, newspapers articles, the internet or public events.⁸¹

The naming of both Caprivi and Lüderitz were made with the sanction of the opposition parties in the National Assembly. These political parties are the authentic representatives of all Namibians. It would, therefore, be inaccurate to conclude that consultation did not take place. The renaming will fail if there is no consultation. Thus, a proposed name is only unlikely to succeed if “no broad based community survey has been undertaken or if the proposal does not have strong local community support” which also echoes UNGEGN guidelines.⁸² Thus, the Delimitation commission seems to have followed the right procedure, based on internationally acceptable standards. It appears that consultation did indeed take place and that the approval was given by the communities. The article written by Immanuel Shinovene in *The Namibian* asserts that the communities were consulted:

The Governor of the Zambezi Region, Lawrence Sampofu, announced that “Those who are complaining are people who do not attend meetings. Most of

⁷⁹ A. Muchali, “Caprivi name change is a political move”, *Namibian Sun*, August 14, 2013, p. 11.

⁸⁰ Immanuel Shinovene and Luqman Cloete, “!Nami=nūs residents against new name”, *The Namibian*, August 12, 2013, p. 1, <https://www.namibian.com.na/112868/archive-read/Nami%E2%89%A0%C3%BCs-residents-against-new-> [accessed June 6, 2019].

⁸¹ South African Geographical Names, *Handbook*: 31.

⁸² Geographical Names Committee, *Policies and Standards for Geographical Naming in Western Australia*, Government of Western Australia, 2017: 45.

them are from opposition parties," Sampofu said the Zambezi Regional Council consulted various stakeholders including traditional leaders, businesspeople and other members of the community.⁸³

This contradicts the message of the demonstrators who claimed that: "All the people of Caprivi, including traditional chiefs and the entire leadership of Caprivi, were not asked whether or not they supported the name change."⁸⁴

More recently, the renaming of Moses Garoëb Project School after Dr Abraham Iyambo triggered controversy. An article headlined "At this time we rename a school" which appeared in the *Namibian Sun* of 23 October 2017, took issue with the renaming of the school:

We were very surprised to learn that on Friday, the Moses Garoëb Primary School was renamed Dr Abraham Iyambo Primary school. As far as we could establish, the school was repainted and renovated for this occasion [...]. We wonder what the cost was of renaming this school; new logos, new letterheads and the like.⁸⁵

This article questions the wisdom of renaming of this school in the economic climate at the time. In addition the renaming was carried out at the time when the supply of food to several schools had been suspended ostensibly due to a financial crisis.

The linguistic structure of place names

Place names exhibit a certain naming structure. Maria Aleff argues that place names have a binary structure e.g. appellative and modifier.⁸⁶ The hybrid place names in Namibia consist of an appellative and a modifier, for example: Klein Otjiruse consists of an appellative Otjiruse and the modifier, Klein. Similarly, the name, Kromneck, consists of neck, an appellative and krom a modifier. There are, however, names that consist of a personal name such as Lüderitz and Caprivi.

In Africa languages "the name-forming process is typically a derivational one. Names are derived from some primary sources in the language such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, noun phrases, clauses etc."⁸⁷ Place names which are derived from nouns and modifiers are very common in Oshiwambo, for example, Omwandi gwoondha (African ebony tree of penises). This name referred to the tree which was earmarked as a place for circumcision in Ondonga. The tree was renamed Omwandi gwAalumentu (tree for men) because it is considered a taboo to use the word 'oondha'. This noun phrase consists of

⁸³ Immanuel Shinovene, "Zambezi name change to stay – Sampofu", *The Namibian*, August 23, 2013, p. 1, <https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=113328&page=archive-read> [accessed June 6, 2019].

⁸⁴ United Democratic Party, "Caprivi Freedom, History of the Caprivi Strip", <http://www.caprivifreedom.com/history.i?cmd=view&hid=28> [accessed June 6, 2019].

⁸⁵ "At this time we, rename a school", *Namibian Sun*, October 23, 2017, p. 6, <https://www.namibiansun.com/news/at-this-time-we-rename-a-school/> [accessed June 6, 2019].

⁸⁶ Maria Aleff, "German urbanonyms in German South West Africa", *Journal of Namibia Studies*, 22, 2017: 7-24.

⁸⁷ Adrian Koopman, "Male nad femal names in Zulu", *African Studies*, 38 (1), 1979: 153-166 (153).

the noun Omwandi and the genitive gwoondha. The name, Omukunda omutiheyali (The seventh ward), has a slightly different structure. Although this is also a noun phrase, it consists of a noun, omukunda (ward) and an enumerative, omutiheyali (seventh). This name referred to a ward in the Onandjokwe Lutheran Hospital which was reserved for TB patients. The name was linked to the fact that alcoholism led to TB infection which forced the heavy drinkers to end up in the seventh ward in Onandjokwe Lutheran

In Bantu languages, such as Oshiwambo or Otjiherero, there are noun classes, and names in these languages are based on those classes. There are several names which consist of the diminutive prefix 'ka' of class 12 which appear after the pre-prefix 'o'. The Otjiherero name, Okamaruru, includes the diminutive prefix, ka, hence it belongs to class 12 while the Oshiwambo name, Olumbongo belongs to class 11 with prefix 'lu' which refers to tininess. A connective particle 'na' may also be used to construct a toponym, for example Onampadhi which consists of a pre-prefix 'o', a connective particle 'na' and the noun stem 'mpadhi'. This name has undergone a further development as the pre-prefix 'o' of ompadhi has been elided because Oshiwambo does not allow two different vowels to co-exist in a word.

Nama/Damara names are characterised by masculine suffix 'b' such as Garibib and feminine suffix 's', e.g. Gobabis and !Usa-lkhōs. These names are often accompanied by markings denoted click sounds. The omission of clicks may lead to a distorted meaning. There is thus a difference between the structure of Khoisan place names and Bantu place names and this may be attributed the fact that Bantu languages are class gender languages while Khoisan languages are sex gender languages.

Recommendations and conclusion

The UNGEGN principles should provide the basis for the management of place name changes in Namibia. Place names should be changed in cases of duplication so that the potential for confusion, particularly for tourists, is minimised. Offensive and objectionable names should be replaced with less controversial names, but such names should only be changed in consultation with the affected communities. Misspelt place names should be corrected. Names should be spelt according to the orthographic rules of a specific language. When the orthography of a language changes, names should not be altered retrospectively unless the existing name is a gross linguistic corruption which must be corrected.

Namibia should establish a national name authority with responsibility for standardising geographical names within the country as recommended by UNGEGN. Such a national body should represent all the different language and cultural groups in Namibia. This body should draw its membership from linguists, cartographers, geographers, historians and land surveyors. Naming a geographical place after a living person should be avoided and, if unavoidable, should only happen posthumously. The person after whom a place is to be named must have contributed significantly to the place to be renamed. When a place is named after a person, the place name should include a generic term to

avoid confusion between a place and a name. The renaming of places is a process that has been ongoing for many years in the Namibia, but typically has happened rather haphazardly, as there are no formal procedures to follow. Although the colonisers renamed several places, they retained some indigenous place names. However, they often corrupted the spelling of place names.

After independence, the formerly oppressed people tried to eliminate symbols of the past injustices by renaming streets and places. Despite the desire to rename places bearing colonial names, there was no policy formulated to regulate the renaming process. As a result, in the new dispensation, new names have been formally proposed and announced by those in power. Communities are usually not consulted properly on their views on proposed names and the local population tend to continue using the old name for several years. Old names have often been replaced with the names of personalities in society. Academic institutions have been targeted for renaming and more schools might receive new names in the near future if measures are not taken to regulate the process. In the absence of a Naming Act, there will continue to be grounds for people to protest against proposed name changes.

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